

MEMORIZING THE QUR'ĀN
*A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR
PRISONERS*

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allāh, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate

I

INTRODUCTION

All praise is due to Allāh. We praise Him, we seek His aid, and we seek His forgiveness. And we seek refuge in Allāh from the evils of our own souls and from the wickedness of our own deeds. Whomever Allāh guides, none can misguide, and for whomever He leads astray, there is no guide. And I bear witness that none deserves to be worshipped besides Allāh alone, without partner, and I bear witness that Muḥammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) is His slave and messenger.

‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنهما) narrates that the Messenger of Allāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

إِنَّمَا مَثَلُ صَاحِبِ الْقُرْآنِ كَمَثَلِ صَاحِبِ الْإِبِلِ الْمُعَقَّلَةِ؛ إِنْ عَاهَدَ عَلَيْهَا أَمْسَكَهَا، وَإِنْ أَطْلَقَهَا ذَهَبَتْ.

“The parable of a companion of the Qur’ān is that of an owner of tethered camels. If he watches over them vigilantly, he will keep them in his possession. But if he lets them roam freely, they will escape.”

Related by al-Buḵārī (5031) and Muslim (789).

Free time is a great gift from Allāh, and few people enjoy more of it than prisoners. The best way we can express our gratitude to Allāh for this gift is through the study, recitation, memorization, contemplation, and implementation of His Noble Book.

MEMORIZING THE QUR'ĀN: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PRISONERS

This brief guide presents readers with a simple practical program to develop a solid mastery of the Qur'ān in less than two years. It is easy to grasp in theory, but putting it into practice requires strict discipline, focus, and consistent, sustained hard work.

I ask Allāh to make this guide beneficial for brothers and sisters who have been blessed with the honor and privilege of being imprisoned for His cause. And may laudations and peace be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his household, and all of his companions.

II

THE GOAL

You are about to begin a new relationship with the Book of Allāh that will last until your death and benefit you in the Hereafter: in the grave, on the Day of Resurrection, and in al-Firdaws, the highest level of Paradise, in šā' Allāh.

Your goal is to be able to recite the Qur'ān in its entirety from memory on a weekly basis, as many of the Ṣahābah used to do.

Before you begin, you should be in the habit of reciting one juz' every day from the muṣḥaf. If you are not, then something is wrong with you, and you need to fix it.

Organize your recitation so that it corresponds with the Islamic lunar calendar. On the first day of the month, read the first juz', on the second day, the second juz', and so on. If the month only has twenty-nine days, then read both the twenty-ninth and thirtieth juz's on the twenty-ninth day.

The Qur'ān is divided into seven parts, each part known as a *manzil*. The first manzil contains Sūrat ul-Fātiḥah and the three sūrahs that follow. The second contains the next five. The third contains the next seven. The fourth contains the next nine. The fifth contains the next eleven. The sixth contains the next thirteen. The seventh contains the mufaṣṣal sūrahs which begin with Qāf and end with an-Nās.

Once you have completed this program, you will have established the practice of reciting a manzil a day from memory and a juz' a day from the muṣḥaf. In this way, you will recite the Qur'ān in its entirety from memory each week and from the muṣḥaf each month. Set this as your goal from the outset and know that it can only be attained with the help of Allāh, first and foremost, and then with a great deal of patience, dedication, struggle, and sacrifice.

III

TAJWĪD FIRST

Before you begin to memorize the Qur'ān, study tajwīd and work to perfect your recitation to the best of your ability.

In the process of memorization, you will be reciting the Qur'ān for several hours every day. If you are able to recite correctly, your skills will be further reinforced. Otherwise, the memorization process will deeply ingrain your errors to such an extent that it may be difficult to correct them later on.

In prison, your resources for studying tajwīd may be limited, but make use of whatever you have available. This could mean books, recordings of Qur'ān recitation, or fellow prisoners who are proficient in tajwīd.

IV

HOW TO RECITE

The speed at which you recite will have a significant impact on how long it takes you to complete the memorization process. If you recite too quickly, you will not be able to adhere to the rules of tajwīd. If you recite too slowly, the memorization and review process will take an exceedingly long amount of time and could even make it feel burdensome, which may ultimately cause you to give up altogether.

Start your speed at one page per minute. At this speed, you can adhere to all of the rules of tajwīd while covering a lot of ground in a relatively short amount of time. This speed also makes it easy to organize your schedule when you become busy. If, for instance, you have to recite five juz's today, you know that each juz' contains twenty pages, so it will take an hour and forty minutes, and you can then plan accordingly.

Walk while reciting, even if you only have a small cell to walk in. This will help you to drive away drowsiness and maintain concentration. If you are unable to walk, change your sitting position frequently. Recite aloud whenever possible. This helps to reinforce what you memorize.

V

THE PROGRAM

When it comes to committing short portions of the Qur'ān to memory, it is not necessary to have a fixed daily schedule of memorization and review. But when it comes to memorizing the Qur'ān in its entirety, strict adherence to a set program is essential. Memorizing the Qur'ān is not a hobby; it is a full-time job.

Every day you will have a set quota of material to memorize and review and it will require significant devotion of time and energy.

First and most importantly, you must have a clear, pure, sincere intention. You also must make a habit of asking Allāh for His assistance at every step along the way.

Suppose you are starting out, and so far, you know the thirtieth juz' and some of the twenty-ninth. These form a part of the seventh manzil of the Qur'ān, so this is where you will begin.

On your first day, review everything you know from memory. If you get stuck and need to consult the muṣḥaf on any given page, read that page again from the beginning from memory before moving on.

Next, memorize a new page from the juz' in which you are working. You have not yet completed the twenty-ninth juz', so select a page and memorize it well enough to be able to recite it from memory without consulting the muṣḥaf, making any mistakes, or taking any long pauses. These are your tasks for the first day.

On the second day, you will have three tasks. You will need to recite the page you memorized the previous day forty times from memory. In addition, you will need to recite from memory everything you have memorized so far. Finally, memorize your next daily page.

Your task on the third day will be similar to those of the second, and this will continue until you reach the end of the juz'.

At this point recite the entire juz' from memory five times.

Now memorize a new page from the beginning of the twenty-eighth juz' and proceed as you did with the twenty-ninth, reviewing everything you have covered so far.

When you come to the end of the twenty-eighth juz', recite it five times. Do the same with the twenty-seventh juz'.

In the twenty-sixth juz', only Sūratu Qāf and the first half of Sūrat uḍ-Ḍāriyāt are a part of this manzil, so once you have memorized that, recite it only from memory five times.

Now you have a manzil. At this point you will move back to the first juz'. From now on, you will have four daily tasks: repeat forty times from memory the previous day's page, recite the seventh manzil from memory as well as whatever you have from the first manzil, and memorize a new page.

When you complete the first juz', recite it five times from memory and do the same with each following juz' until you reach the end of the manzil.

At this point, you have two manzils, so you will now begin to alternate them. One day, you will recite the seventh manzil, the next day, the first.

Proceed with the second manzil in a similar manner. As you complete each manzil, rotate them so that every day you recite a different manzil. At the same time, continue with your other three daily tasks.

Once you finish this process and commit all seven manzils to memory, recite the first manzil on Saturdays, the second on Sundays, and so on, so that you complete the Qur'ān every Friday. This was the practice of Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. As the months and years pass, in šā' Allāh, the Qur'ān will become more and more deeply engraved in your heart.

VI

COMMON OBSTACLES

Beware of disobeying Allāh outwardly or inwardly. Some of the most common pitfalls for prisoners are sins of the tongue such as backbiting, slander, and lying. Be truthful in your speech and avoid lying at all costs.

Then there are the poison arrows of Iblīs. You must resist looking at members of the opposite sex or pictures of them. This is especially harmful to prisoners because incarceration heightens one's sensitivity to such things. If you abstain from this for the sake of Allāh, He will put a sweetness in your heart greater than what you experience looking at such images.

Avoid eating too much or sleeping too much.

Only associate with others for beneficial purposes such as da'wah, commanding good and forbidding evil, studying, and teaching.

Avoid talking too much and people who talk too much, because memorizing the Qur'ān is a time-consuming endeavor and there are only twenty-four hours in a day. Look at people who try to steal from your time as you would look at people who try to steal from your wealth. Most prisoners have no sense of the value of time and are more concerned with killing it than benefiting from it. Do not let them stand in the way of achieving your objective.

VII

SOME WORDS OF ADVICE

It is easy to memorize the Qur'ān; retaining it is the challenge. Do not cut corners in implementing this program.

As you memorize, you should have someone check your recitation for errors on a regular basis. In prison, this is not always possible, so in the absence of such a person, you must be very careful not to make careless mistakes.

Make sure that what you consume is ḥalāl. Pay special attention to this point.

Regular cardiovascular exercise will help you focus your mind and keep wandering thoughts under control. This should be a part of your schedule.

If you feel the need to further reinforce what you have memorized after you complete this program, recite each āyah individually one hundred times from memory.

If you find yourself stuck at the end of an āyah, unable to recall what follows, open the muṣḥaf and look at the āyah on which you are stuck as well as the one that follows it. Now close the muṣḥaf and recite both āyahs ten times together.

Once you complete this program you may sometimes be overburdened with other responsibilities to the point that your schedule of completing the Qur'ān weekly is disrupted. When this happens, you can split it up into two weeks, but try not to let that happen very often. Otherwise, what you miss one day, you can make it up the next day in addition to that day's quota.

As time passes, you will begin to associate each manzil with the corresponding day of the week, and you will inevitably feel perturbed whenever you fail to complete your daily manzil.

Only use the muṣḥaf of Madīnah. As you memorize, you will begin to remember where each āyah is placed on each page, and you will be able to flip

through the pages in your mind. Alternating between different muṣḥafs during the memorization process can cause a lot of unnecessary frustration. The muṣḥaf of Madīnah can be replaced easily if your copy is ever lost or confiscated.

In your spare time, read books of Qur'ān commentary, especially those of 'Abd ur-Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir as-Si'dī and Ibn Kaṭīr, as well as Tafsīr ul-Jalālayn. All three are available in single-volume editions, which is helpful if there is a limit on the number of books you can possess.

If you do not understand Arabic, learn it. It can be self-taught. If no one is available to teach you, do not use that as an excuse to fail to learn it.

Many āyāt resemble one another, and this can cause difficulties even for seasoned memorizers of the Qur'ān. The more you progress, the more you will encounter this. Be mindful of it and try to develop techniques to help yourself remember differences between these āyāt.

The recitation of the Qur'ān is an act of worship, and as such, it should be kept concealed from the eyes and ears of others as far as possible. Prison is a crowded place, and this may be difficult or even impossible. Nevertheless, as far as you are able, try to keep your recitation and memorization a private matter between you and Allāh.

After completing this program, remember that you now have the Book of Allāh with you in your heart, so do not put it in places or situations that are not appropriate for the Book of Allāh.

Finally, never lose sight of the fact that the Qur'ān is meant to be implemented, not simply recited, so strive your utmost to turn it into a living reality:

﴿لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ
وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ
بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَنْفَعٌ لِلنَّاسِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ
وَرُسُلَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ﴾

“We have sent aforetime Our Messengers with Clear Signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that people may stand forth in justice; and We sent down Iron, in which is mighty material for war, as well as many benefits for mankind, so that Allāh may test who it is that will help Him and His Messengers unseen; for Allāh is Full of Strength, Exalted in Might.”

Sūrat ul-Ḥadīd (25)